

# ON THE ETHNONYMES IN THE THAI LINGUISTIC FAMILY IN VIETNAM

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1. An ethnonyme can have different origins: calling name or called one. When determining ethnic compositions, researchers base their determination on scientific data in order to give an appellation that can coincide incompletely with the calling name or called one.

For the ethnies belonging to the Thai linguistic family in Vietnam, the ethnonymes of Tay, Nung, Thai, Tho are not strange. However, a foreign scholar once asked me seriously "*You are Tay-Nung people not Tay-Thai, aren't you?*".

After hearing my explanation, she advised me to distinguish Tai, Tay, Nung, Tho when I have the chance, in comparing with the way of writing in foreign paper in order to avoid mistakes when researching, reading referent books in English and French facing *tai, tay, thai, tho...*

That seems simple but to "*speak with evidence*" for the the way writing is used by these scholars, we have to spend more time researching carefully... as citing follow although they are insufficient, I would like to give the following citations.

2. At first, it's necessary to distinguish the ethnonyme of Thai as referring to the Thai in particular from the usage of Thai linguistic family in general.

For the name of *Thai* referring to the *Thai ethnic group*, in English and French documents, we face: *Thai* or *thai*, *tay* or *tai*<sup>1</sup>. (note *h*-silent in French).

The name of Thai is used to indicate the ethnic groups belonging to Thai linguistic family in general among which Tay is the most crowded and more exactly, it is clearly called as *Tay-Thai linguistic family, Tay-Thai linguistic group*. For example:

- Displaying room... describes the environment, cultural scene and the lifestyle of 8 ethnies under Tay- Thai linguistic group (Hong Thanh - Open the displaying room for the culture of Tay - Thai languages speaking ethnies group. *Tin tức huoi chieu*, 6/9/1997, p.2).

Used this meaning, the scientific content of the *Vietnam Programme of Thai Studies* (founded from 7 September 1989 under *Centre for Vietnamese and Intercultural Studies, Hanoi National University*), not only involved in the Thai exactly but also the involved object of *this Programme* is the other 7 nations in the same linguistic family, they are: *Tay, Nung, Giay, Lao, Lu, Cao Lan - San Chay, Bo Y*.

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<sup>1</sup> BENEDICT, P.K. - *Austro-Thai and Austroasiatic AS*. 1976, pp. 1-36

BONIFACY, A. - *étude sur les Tay de la Rivière Claire au Tonkin et dans la Chine méridionale (Yunnan et Kouangsi)* TP sér. 2, 8, 1907. pp. 77-98. [Bảng từ: Giáy (Dioi), Nùng An, Nung Chuong, Thô blanc, Thô noir, Trung chã (Cao Lan)... MARTINI, F. - Romanisation des parlers tay du Nord Vietnam. *BEFEO* 46, 1954, pp.555-572.

GEDNEY, W. J. - *Yay, a Northern Tai language in North Vietnam*. *Lingua*, n°.14, 1965, pp. 180-193.

HAUDRICOURT, A.G. - *étude des mots signifiant "oeil" et "mourir" dans les langues de la famille*.

Unpublished manuscripts on Tai languages at EFEO: Black Tai of Maïdo; Black Tai of M̐m-th-Āeng; Black Tai of Lai Ch̐ou, Black Tai of S̐ĕn La; Black Tai of Thach L-Āeng; Th̐ of B̐c Giang; Th̐ of B̐c Giang: Th̐ of Co-ky; Th̐ of Ch-ra; Th̐ of B̐c C'n; Th̐ of Soc Giang; Th̐ of Don-ny; Th̐ of Trung K̐nh phu; Th̐ of Cao B̐ng and Lang S̐ĕn; Th̐ of Cao B̐ng, Th̐ of Cao Binh and Nguyn̐ Binh; Thai of Y̐n Bi; White Tai of Lai Ch̐ou, Paris, EFEO, 1949.

In English and French documents, we also face *Thai* or *thai*, *tay* or *tai* <sup>1</sup>.

3. *Tay* and *Nung* are two ethnies under Thai linguistic family, and *Tay* was called *Tho* formerly. It is necessary to see that to the daily conversation of the local people, as one wishes and according to region, they use both:

Kân Thổ:	Thổ people
Kân Tày:	Tày people" <sup>2</sup> .

Nowdays in Lang Son, in everyday language of the natives, the *Tay* sometimes is called *can Tho* = people *Thổ*). and someone like to specify them as *Tày Thổ*.

Therefore, in foreign documents, we sometimes see *thô* <sup>3</sup> that is used to define *Tày*.

It is remarkable that since the population survey in 1979, with the appellation determination unifying for 54 ethnies remain in Vietnamese great family, and in formal documents, the name of *Thổ* has been used to imply a ethnic minority under Viet - Muong group only.

Some authors as F. M. Savina, J. Saul... distinguish the tongue of *Tay* to the tongue of *Nung*.

*Yên Sơn* named them the *Nông* to distinguish them from the *Nung* people in *Moncay*, who is really the *Hoa* (Chinese) in the region (see footnote 3, pp. 15-16).

Poet *Triều Ân* and be dead national culturalist *Hoàng Quyết* have ever insisted that: "The tongue of *Tay* is phonetically very rich" <sup>4</sup>. In the *Introduction* for his doctoral thesis of philology Ph. D. dissertation, *Mong Ky Slay* confirm clearly that: "The tongue of *Nung* is under Thai linguistic family. Within the same origin of the tongue of *Nung* in Vietnam, there are the ones of *Tay*, *Thai*, *Bo Y*, *Giay*..." <sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Y■n SEn.- *Học tiếng Thổ ra Việt, Fp, Hoa (Nng Moncay)* - Pratique de langue Tho traduite en Vi■namien, Français et Chinois dit Nung de Mongcay. Nhự in Quốc gia Việt Nam, 1950, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> DARNAULT, R. - *Cours de dialecte Thổ; comprenant des éléments de grammaire, un vocabulaire français-Thô; une conversation usuelle*. Imprimerie du Nord, 1939.

DAY, A.C.- *The syntax of Thổ, a Tai language of Vietnam*. Ph. D. dissertation. University of London, SOAS, 1966, 149 p.

DEGEORGE, P.J.B.- *Proverbes, maximes et sentences tays* - *Anthropos*, 1927, 22; pp. 911-932; 1928- 23; pp. 595-616.

DIGUET, E.- *étude de la langue Thổ*. Paris, Augustin Challamel, 1910; /2/, I-IV, 5-132p.

Nguyễn Văn Huyền.- *Recueil des chants de mariage Thổ de Lạng Sơn et Cao Bằng*- H.: Extrême - Orient, 1941. - 181 p. VVANHOC: PL 838.

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SAVINA F, M.- *Dictionnaire Tay - Annamite - Français*. Hanoi - Haiphong, 1910, 488p.; *Dictionnaire étymologique Français - Nung - Chinois*. Hongkong, 1924, 528p.

SAUL J.- *Classifiers in Nung*. *Lingua*, n. 13, 1964, pp.278-290.

<sup>3</sup> Triều Ân - Hoàng Quyết.- *Từ điển thành ngữ - tục ngữ dân tộc Tày*. Hà Nội, Nxb VHDT, 1996, p.8. Triều Ân ed. - *Then Tày những khúc hát*. Ed. Văn hoá Dân tộc. 2000. 659 p.

<sup>4</sup> Mông Ký Slay.- *Khảo sát các đặc điểm ngữ âm Nùng trên tư liệu Nùng Cháo*. Viện Ngôn ngữ học, 1996, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> At the Institute of Han-Nom Studies, National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities, was opened, since May 26, 2000, a class of *Nôm Tày - Nùng* and the surprise is the presence of twenty young learners from inside and outside the Institute.

In the natives' cognition, the distinguishing between Tay and Nung often limited only in the phonetic differences (initial consonant, rhyme and tone) expressed through couplet regulations. We had met a married couple who were born far from each other only a river, the husband articulates *chin* but the wife says *kin* (= to eat).

There exist also lexical differences but there are few numbers of variations. However, some cases are not considered unifiedly, for example in order to indicate *grapefruit*, somebody says *mac pàng* in Tay, *mac pục* in Nung, someone says on the contrary.

4. Meanwhile, many researchers consider that because of their nearest relationship, it is said that these two ethnies have a common language - the tongue of Tay - Nung.

*The tongue of Tay - Nung* has been well acquainted in Vietnam by the researchers for about recent thirty years. It is the alternative habitation and the linguistic closeness cause to an oral integration of the Tay and Nung in the region, especially in the last half of this century.

It is regret that the demotic character Nôm Tay - Nung <sup>1</sup> isn't popularized though the number of collected documents and texts is remarkable.

In fact, the tongue of Tay - Nung mainly remains in different oral dialects. Many efforts have been spent to the standardization of Tay-Nung tongue to develop latinized characters since 1969 but this set wasn't welcome and integrated into practice. Because of many subjective and objective reasons, some Tay and Nung intellectuals do not accept completely.

In a collective work, Ha Van Thu, a skillful culturalist who lived for a long time beside the Tay, the Nung and a Tay ethnologist, La Van Lo (both were dead), agreed to confirm: "*The difference between the tongue of Tay and the tongue of Nung was of only local characteristics*" <sup>2</sup>.

In another collective one, three linguistic researchers of Tay people, among them Prof. Dr. Hoang Van Ma affirmed: "*It may say that the Tay and the Nung have a common language*" <sup>3</sup>.

Luc Van Pao, a Tay researcher who is successful in collecting many precious documents had said: "*This book aimed to serve the Tay - Nung people an original in Tay - Nung language*" <sup>4</sup>.

Prof. Dr. Doan Thien Thuat, a phonetician who spent many years to examine and to research this language, noted: "*The ethnies Tay and Nung speak a common language that is the Tay - Nung tongue. Many linguists classed it to Tay - Thai branch, sino-Thai, sino-tibetan previously but it is classed to austronesian family recently*" <sup>5</sup>.

Dr. Cung Van Luoc, a specialist in demotic character considered: "*The Tay, the Nung speak a common language*". He also advised us to identify: "*Tay includes also all ethnies of the same linguistic family who resided in the north of Vietnam and in Hwanan (China), Myanmar, Thailand, Lao and the East of India. That was the ancient Tay*" <sup>6</sup>.

5. *The ethnonymes* is of the researches on *name-stydy* (or *onomasiology*, *onomatology*, *onomatics*). By their origin, there are calling name and called name by other ethnies, ethnonyme called by scientific researchers (and/or translated into foreign languages) and formal name written in legal document. Those names can be unified in one although they can be very different from each other. Their difference can not only be in phonetico-lexical level but also in stylistic aspect (neuter or disparaging terms). The distinctions can imply temporary characteristics, that means the ethnonyme (includes formal one) is varied when it is used in different timing dates.

<sup>1</sup> Hà Văn Thư - Lã Văn Lô.- *Văn hoá Tây-Nùng*. Hà Nội, Ed. Văn hoá, 1984, p.50

<sup>2</sup> Hoàng Văn Ma, Lục Văn Pảo, Hoàng Chí.- *Ngữ pháp tiếng Tây-Nùng*. Hà Nội, Ed. KHXH, 1971, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Lục Văn Pảo.- *Thành ngữ Tây-Nùng*. Hà Nội, Ed. KHXH, 1991, p.6

<sup>4</sup> Đoàn Thiện Thuật.- *Hệ thống ngữ âm tiếng Tây-Nùng. Tìm hiểu các dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam*, 1972, p.71

<sup>5</sup> *Văn hóa truyền thống Tây Nùng*. Hà Nội, Ed. Văn hoá Dân tộc, 1993, pp.22,23.

<sup>6</sup> *Truyện cổ xứ Lạng*. Tập I: Dân tộc Tày, Nùng. Collected, selectionned and presented by Nguyễn Duy Bắc. Hà Nội, Ed. Văn hoá Dân tộc, 1997, 286 p. XH: Vb 37723.

According to our current determination of ethnic compositions (*Tay, Nung, Thai, Tho* have been formal ethnonymes since 1979 for 4 within 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam.

Therefore, we shouldn't write in Vietnamese:

- \* *người Tày-Nùng; người Tày-Thái* (the Tay-Nung people, the Tay- Thai people)
- \* *dân tộc Tày-Nùng, dân tộc Tày-Thái...* (the Tay-Nung nationality, the Tay-Thai nationality)

and should write such as in Vietnamese:

- *người Tày, người Nùng, người Thái* (the Tay people, the Nung people, the Thai people)
- *(các) dân tộc Tày, Nùng*<sup>1</sup> (the Tay, Nung nationalities)

or we can write:

- *các dân tộc Tày Nùng Thái* (the Tay Nung Thai nationalities, no hyphen) or
- *các dân tộc Tày - Thái*<sup>2</sup> (the Tay - Thai nationalities)

while we can write:

- *tiếng Tày-Nùng*<sup>3</sup> (the Tay-Nung tongue)
- *nhóm ngôn ngữ Tày-Thái*<sup>4</sup> (the Tay-Thai linguistic group),
- *các dân tộc nói ngôn ngữ Thái - Tày*<sup>5</sup> (the Thai-Tay languages speaking nationalities).

Linguistic researches on ethnic minorities languages in general, on Tay-Thai languages in particular should be determined and understood correctly in comparison to acquainted ethnonymes in order to avoid take a hen for a moor hen, as in Vietnamese "*husband says chicken, wife says duck*". The above issued given with the hope that they would be considered suggestions of carefulness in researching the languages of Vietnamese ethnic minorities which include the languages of Tay-Thai linguistic family.

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<sup>1</sup> Ngô Đức Thịnh. In: *Văn hoá và lịch sử người Thái ở VN*, Ed. Văn hoá dân tộc, 1998, p. 449.

<sup>2</sup> Lương Bền.- *Vài ý kiến về hệ thống âm vị tiếng Tày-Nùng*. *Ngôn ngữ*, n. 4-1972.

Hoàng Tuấn Cư- Mông Ký Slay.- *Câu đố Tày - Nùng*. Hà Nội, Ed. Văn hoá dân tộc, 1993, 176 p.

<sup>3</sup> Cẩm Trọng. - *Một số vấn đề khoa học đặt ra với Thái học VN*. In: *Văn hoá và lịch sử người Thái ở VN*, Ed. Văn hoá dân tộc, 1998, p. 7

<sup>4</sup> Lê Sĩ Giáo. In: *Văn hoá và lịch sử người Thái ở VN*, Ed. Văn hoá dân tộc, 1998, p. 53

<sup>5</sup> Tiếng Pa-coô thuộc ngôn ngữ Mon-Khmer ở vùng núi vùng núi miền Trung Việt Nam, phía tây thành phố Huế.